## THE STRIPED CHEST.

By CONAN DOYLE.

the steadied his gines against the missen shrouds and he looked long and hard at this disconsolate stranger every time she came recling up on to the creat of a roller that he had been startled. earne realing up on to the creat of a roll.

"What's the matter."
"Murder's the matter, sir. There's a man bere with his brains beaten out." low in the water that I could only catch

occasional glimpse of a pea-green line of bulwark. She was a brig, but her mainmast had been snapped short off some ten feet above the deck and no effort seemed to have been made to cut away the wreckage, which floated, salls and yards, like the broken wing of a wounded gull, upon the water beside her. The foremast was still standing, but the foretopsail was flying loose, and the headsails were streaming out in long white pennons in front of her. Never have I seen a vessel which appeared to have gone

ough rougher handling. entild not be surprised at that for But we could not be surprised at that for there had been times during the last three days when it was a question whether our own back would ever see land again. For thirty six hours we had kept her nose to it, and if the Mary Sinchair had not been as good a scaboat as ever left the Clyde we could not have come through. And yet here we were at the end of it with the loss only of our gig and a part of the starboard bul-wark. It did not astonish us, however, when the smother had cleared away to find that the smather had cleared away to and that objects had been less lucky and that this munifated bigs, staggering about upon a buge sea and under a cloudless sky, had been left, like a blinded man after a lightning thish, to tell of the terror which is

Allardyce, who was a slow and methodical Smitchman, started long and hard at the little craft, while our scamen lined the bulwark or clustered upon the fore surouds to have view of the stranger. gives and longitude 10 degrees, which wer glout our bearings, one becomes a little curl-ous as to whom one meets, for one has left the main lines of Atlantic commerce to the north. For ten days we had been sailing over a solitary rea. "Sho's dereliet, I'm thinking," said the

second mate.
I had come to the same conclusion, for could see no sign of life upon her deck, and there was no answer to the friendly wavings from our seamen. Her crew had probably

descried her under the impression that she was about to founder. was about to founder.

"She can't last long," continued Allardyce.
In his measured way. "She may put her nose
down and her tall up any minute. The
water's ligating up to the edge of her rail."

"What's her flag?" I asket.

"Um trying to make out. It's got all

"Um trying to make out. It's got all twisted and tangled with the hallards. Yes, I've got it now, clear through. It's the Brazilian flag, but it's wrong side up." Sho had holsted a signal of distress, then before her people had abandoned her. Per-haps they had only just gone. I took the mate's glass and looked round over the in-multuous face of the deep blue Atlantic, still veined and starred with white lines and spoutings of foam. But nowhere could I see anything human beyond ourselves.

"There may be living men aboard," said I.

"There may be salvage," muttered the sec-

Then we will run down upon her lee side

We were not more than 100 yards from her when we award our foreyard aback, and there we were, the bark and the brig, ducking and bowing like two clowns in a dance. "Drop one of the quarter boats," said I.

"Take four men, Mr. Allardyce, and see what you can learn of her." But just at that moment my first officer, self to this abandoned vessel and to see what there might be aboard of her. So, with a word to Armetrong, I swung myself over the side, slipped down the falls and took my place in

the sheets of the boat. It was but a little distance, but it took time to traverse and so heavy was the roll that often when we were in the trough of the seas we could not see either the bark which we had left nor the brig which we were approaching. The sinking sun did not ponetrate down there, and it was cold and dark in the hollows of the waves, but each passing billow heaved us up into the warmto and the sunshine once more. At each of these moments, as we hung upon a whitecapped ridge between the two dark valleys, I caught a glimpse of the long pea-green line and the nodding foremast of the brig, and I steered so as to come round by her stern, so that we might determine which was the best way of boarding her. As we passed her we saw the name Nossa Schnora da Victoria printed across ber dripping counter,

"The weather side, sir," said the second mate. "Stand by with the boathook, carpenter!" An instant later we had jumped over the bulwarks, which were hardly higher than our boat, and found ourselves upon the

dick of the abandoned vessel.

Our first thought was to provide for our own safety in case—as seemed very probable—the vessel should settle down beneath our feet. With this object two of our men held on to the painter of the heat and fended her off from the vessel's side, so that she might be ready in case we had to make a hurried retreat. The carpenter was sent to find how much water there was, and whether it was still gaining while the other scaman, Allardyce and myself made a rapid inspec-

tion of the vessel and her cargo.

The deck was littered with wreckage and with henegoes, in which the dead birds were with henceops, in which the dead philos were washing about. The boats were gone, with the exception of one, the bottom of which had been stove, and it was certain that the crew had abandoned the vessel. The cabin was in a deckhouse, one side of which had been beaten in by a heavy sea. Allardyce and I entered it, and found the captain's table as he had left it, his books and papers all Spanish or Portuguese scattered over soked about for the log, but could not

"As likely as not he never kept one." said Allardyce. Things are pretty slack aboard a South American trader, and they don't do more than they can help. If there was one it must have been taken away

with him in the bout."
"I should like to take all these books and papers," said I. "Ask the carpenter how papers," said I. such time we have."

His report was reassuring. The vessel was full of water, but some of the cargo was buoyant, and there was no immediate danger of her sinking. Probably she would never sink, but would drift about as one of these terrible unmarked reefs which have

Bahia a month before. The name of the captain was Texeira, but there was no record as to the number of the crew. She was bound for London, and a glance at the tills of lading was sufficient to show me that we were not likely to profit much in the way of salvage. Her cargo consisted of buts, ginger and wood, the latter in the shap great logs of valuable tropical growths was those, no doubt, which had prevented the ill-fated yessel from going to the bottom but they were of such a size as to make it impossible for us to extract them. Besides these there were a few fancy goods, such as a number of ornamental birds for millinery purposes and 100 cases of preserved fruits. And then as I turned over the papers I came upon a short note in English which arrested

upon the peep, with his short, thick legs astretch, for the gale had left a considerable swell behind it, and our two quarterboats nearly touched the water with every roll. He steadied his glass against the missen

"Killed in the storm," said I.
"Maybe so, sir. But I'll be surpris
you think so after you have seen him."

This way, sir bere in the main deck

dation below the brig, for there was the after so for the captain, another by the main hatchway with the cook's galley attached to it, and a third in the forecastis for the men, it was to this middle one that the mate led me. As you entered, the galley with its litter of tumbled pots and dishes was upon the right and upon the left was a small room with two bunks for the officers. Then beyond was a place about twelve feet square, which was littered with flags and spare canvas. All eyes which gleamed with curootty and round the wash area, a pumper of reckers. was littered with flags and spare canyas. All eyes which gleamed with curiosity and round the wails were a bumber of packets done up in coarse cloth and carefully lashed to the woodwork. At the other end was a great box, striped red and white, though the red was so faded and the white, so dicty that it was so faded and the white so dicty that it was so faded and the white so dicty that it was so faded and the white so dicty that it was so faded and the white so dicty that it was so faded and the white so dicty that it was so faded and the white so dicty that it was so faded and the white so dicty that it was so faded and the white so dicty that it was so faded and the white so dicty that it was so faded and the white so dicty that it was so faded and the was so faded and the

"What do you make of her. Allardyce," I taked.

My second mate was standing beside me upon the poop, with his short, thick legs in the poop in the poop, with his short, thick legs in the poop in

like that chest before. That's worth a pile of money just as it stands. But it's so heavy that surely there must be something valuable inside of it. Don't you think that we ought to open it and see?"
"If you break it open you will spoil it as likely as not," said the second mate.

Armstrong squatted down in front of it with his head on one side and his lor thin none within a few inches of the lock "The wood is oak," said he, "and it has shronk a little with age. If I had a chisel or a strong-bladed knife I could force the lock back without doing any damage at

The mention of a strong-bladed knife made me think of the dead seamen upon the brig

job when some one came to interfere with

was by subsequent measurement four feet able it will be worth as much if it is opened



"TLL DRIVE THE LOCK BACK IF YOU WILL BOTH STAND BY."

larger than a seaman's chest.

it was not to the box that my eyes dark man, with a short, curling beard. He lay as far as it was possible from the box with his feet toward it and his head away. A round crimson halo was printed upon the "That's enough, Mr. Armstrong," said I. white canvas on which his head was resting, abruptly. But just at that moment my first officer.
Mr. Armstrong, came on deck, for seven bells had struck and it was but a few minutes off his watch. It would interest me to go myself to this abandoned vessel and to see what there might be abourd of her. So, with a word to Armstrong. I swung myself over the side, only when I stopped that I could see, and his face was as placid as that of a sleeping child. It was added. "Because a box is a treasure box is only when I stopped that I could perceive to reason that it has treasures inside his injury, and then I turned away with an low. A good many folk have had a per exclamation of horror. He had been poleaxed i apparently by some person standing behind him. A frightful blow had smashed in the top of his head and penetrated deeply into his brain. His face might well be placid, for death must have been absolutely instantan-eous, and the position of the wound showed that he could never have seen the person

who had inflicted it. "Is that foul play or accident, Captain Barclay?" asked my second mate demurely.
"You are quite right, Mr. Allardyce." The
man has been murdered—struck down from
above by a sharp and heavy weapon. But who was he, and why did they murder

"He was a common sailor, sir," said the "You can see that if you look at his "He turned out his pockets as he spoke and brought to light a pack of cards, some tarred string and a bundle of Brazilian

"Hullo look at this!" said he The steel was shining and bright, so that

beggar now. I can't make these things out that are lashed to the wall. They seem to be idols and weapons and curios of all sorts

done up in old sacking."
"That's right," said I. "They are the only things of value that we are likely to get from the cargo. Hall the bark and tell into the cabin, them to send the other quarter boat to help us to get the stuff aboard."

At first I saw the cold gray light

While he was away I examined this curious plunder which had come into our possess-The curiosities were so wrapped up that I could only form a general idea as to their nature, but the striped box stood in a good light where I could thoroughly examine it. On the lid, which was clamped and cornered with metal work, there was engraved a complex coat of arms, and beneath it was a line of Spanish which I was able to detailed. It was a figure sprawling upon his face ipher as meaning "The treasure chest of on Ramirez di Leyra, knight of the order St. James, governor and captain keneral of Terra Firma and of the province of Vera-quas." In one corner was the date 1606, and on the other a large white label upon which was written in English. "You are earnestly requested upon no account to open this box." The same warning was repeated underneath in Spanish. As to the lock, it was a very complex and heavy one of en-

graved steel with a Latin motto, which was above a seaman's comprehension.

By the time I had finished this exami-Bent so many stout vessels to the bottom.

"In that case there is no danger in your going below. Mr. Allardyce," said 1. "See what you can make of her, and find out how much of her cargo can be saved. I'll look through these papers while you are gone."

The bills of lading and some notes and letters which lay upon the desk sufficed to inform me that the Brazilian brig Nospa Schnora da Victoria had cleared from Bahia a mouth before. The

that it would have given the boat a happened to him?"

dangerous tilt had we placed it at either

The second mate put his hand upon my sleeve and drew me into his cabin.

where we had found him. The mate had "We can talk here, sir, and we don't a theory that at the moment of the de-sertion of the ship this fellow had started plundering, and that the captain, in an attempt to preserve discipline, had struck him down with a hatchet or some other heavy weavon. It seemed more probable han any other explanation and did not entirely satisfy me, either. But the ocean is full of mysteries, and we were con-

to leave the fate of the dead seamar the Brazilian brig to be added to that a list which every easter can recall.

purposes and 100 cases of preserved fruits. And then as I turned over the papers I came upon a short note in English which arrested my attention.

The heavy box was siung up by ropes on to the deck of the Msry Sinclair, and the safter lockers, there was just space for it to stant. There is a man in it?

There is requested, and the safter lockers, there was just space for it to stant. There is remained during supper, and after that there is a man in it?

There is remained through the same out of the Santarem collection, and which are consigned to Prontfoot & Neuman of Oxford street, London, should be put in some place where there may be no danger of these very valuable and unique.

three inches in length, three feet two inches in the owner's offices as in the cabin of the in height and three feet across—considerably Mary Sinclair." The first officer seemed bitterly deap

pointed at my decision. or my thoughts were turned as I entered the storerroom. On the floor, lying across the litter of bunting, there was stretched a small, his thin lips. "If it gets out of our own

now. A good many folk have had a peep into it since the days of the old governor

of Terra Firma." Armstrong threw the screwdriver down upon the table and shrugged his shoulders. "Just as you like," said he, but for the rest of the evening, although we spoke were continually coming round with th same expression of curiosity and greed the old striped box.

And now I come to that portion of my story which fills me even now with a shud-dering horror when I think of it. The main bin hal the rooms of the officers round but mine was the furthest away from It at the end of the little passage which led to the companion. No regular watch was kept by me, except in cases of emergency. the three mates divided them among b. Armstrong had the middle watch. which ends at 4 in the morning, and he was relieved by Allardyce. For my part I have always been one of the soundest of sleepers It was a large open knife with a stiff spring blade which he had picked up from the floor. upon my shoulder to arouse me.

And yet I was aroused that night, or

could not associate it with the crime, and the dead man had apparently held it in was just 4:39 by my chronometer when his hand when he was struck down, for it still lay within his grasp.

"It looks to me, sir, as if he knew he was in danger, and kept his knife handy," said the mate. "However, we can't help the poor beggar now. I can't make these things out all was now silent. And yet it could not for the could not be the could have been imagination, that hideous cry, for the echo of it still rang in my head, and it seemed to have come from some place quite close to me. I sprang from my bunk and pulling on some clothes, I made my way

At first I saw nothing unusual there. the cold gray light I made out the red-clothed table, the six rotating chairs, the walnut lockers, the swinging barometer and there at the end the big striped chest. I was turn-ing away with the intention of going upon deck and asking the second mate if he had his arms thrown forward and his body twisted. One glance told me that it was Armstrong, the first officer, and a second that he was a dead man. For a few moments I stood gasping. Then I rushed on to the deck, called Allardyce to my assistance and came back with him into the cabin. Together we pulled the unfortunate fellow com under the table, and as we looked at his dripping head we exchanged glances.

sleeve and drew me into his cabin.
"We can talk here, sir, and we don't know who may be listening to us in there. What do you suppose is in that box, Captain Barclay?"

"I give you my word, Allardyce, that ive no idea."
"Well, I can only find one theory which will fit all the facts. Look at the size of the box. Look at all the carving and metal work which may conceal any number of holes. Look at the weight of it. It took four men to carry it. On the top of that remember that two men have tried to open it, and both have come to their end through

bidity. Our treasure trove had excited him greatly, and already he had begun with glistening eyes, to reckon up how much it night be worth to each of us when the shares of the salvage came to be divided.

"If the paper said that they were unique. Captain Barclay, then they may be worth anything that you may like to name. You wouldn't believe the sums that the rich."

We wouldn't believe the sums that the rich.

"You think the salvage that the label salvage."

"You think the salvage that the label salvage."

"You think, then, that the label asking people not to open the box was simply written in his interest."
"Yes, sir, that is not idea. Have you any

other way of explaining the facts?"
I had to confess that I had not.
"The question is what are we to do?"

The man's a dangerous ruffian who sticks at nothing. I'm thinking it wouldn't be a bad thing to put a rope around the chest and tow it alongside for half an hour. Then we could open it at our ease. Or if we just tied the box up and kept him from getting any water maybe that would do just as well. On the carpenter could put a coat of varnish over

it and stop all the blow holes."
"Come, Allardyce," said I, angrily. "You ion't seriously mean to say that a whole chip's company are going to be terrorized by a single man in a box. If he's there i'll en-gage to fetch him out!" I went to my room "Now, Allardyce," said I. "Do you open the lock and I'll stand on guard." "For God's sake, think what you are doing.

or," cried the mate. "Two men have lost heir lives over it, and the blood of one not

The more reason why we should revenge "Well, sir, at least let me call the cal Three are better than two, and he

a good, stout man. He went off in search of him, and I was left alone with the striped chest in the cabin. I don't think that I'm a nervous man, but I kept the table between me and this solid old relie of the Spanish main. In the gro striping was beginning to appear, and th curious scrolls and wreaths of metal and carving, which showed the loving pains which cunning craftsmen had expended upon it. Presently the carpenter and the mate came back together, the former with a hammer in his band.
"It's a bad business this, sir," said be

shaking his head as he looked at the body of the mate. "And you think there's some one hiding in the box?" "There's no doubt about it," said Allar-lyce, picking up the screwdriver and sci-ing his jaw like a man who needs to brace his courage. "I'll drive the lock back if you will both stand by. If he raises let him have it on the head with your hammer, carpenter! Shoot at once, sir, if he raises his hand. Now!"

He had knelt down in front of the striped He had knelt down in front of the striped cheet and passed the blade of the tool under the lid. With a sharp spick the lock flew back. "Stand by!" yelled the mate, and with a heave he threw open the massive top of the box. As it swung up we all three sprang back, I with my pistol leveled, and the carpenter with the hammer above his head. Then, as nothing happened, we each took a sten forward and peeped in. The box was empty. box was empty.

Not quite empty, either, for in one corner was lying an old yellow candlestick claborately engraved, which appeared to be as old as the box itself. It's rich yellow tone and artistic shape suggested that it was an object of value. For the rest there was nothing more weighty or valuable than dust in the old striped treasure chest.
"Well. I'm blossed!" cried Allardyce, straing blankly into it.
"Where does the weight come in, then?"
"Look at the thickness of the sides and

look at the lid. Why it's five inches through. And see that great metal spring "That's for holding the lid up." said the ate. 'You see it will only stand straight, won't lean back. What's that German rinting on the inside?"
"It means that It was made by Johann

Rothstein of Augsburg in 1696."
"And a solid bit of work, too. But it doesn't throw much light on what has passed, does it, Captain Barchay? That candlestick looks like gold. We shall have something or our trouble after all." He leaned forward to grasp it, and from

that moment I have never doubted as to the reality of inspiration, for on the instant I caught him by the collar and pulled him straight again. It may have been some story of the middle ages which had come back to my mind, or it may have been that my eye caught some red which was not that of rust upon the upper part of the lock, but to him and to me it will always seem an inspiration, so prompt and sudden was my action. "There's deviltry here" said I. "Give me i the crooked stick from the corner,

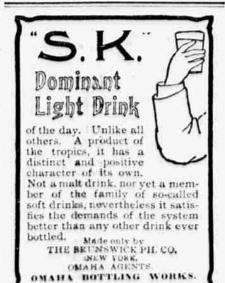
It was an ordinary walking cane with hooked top. I passed it over the candlestick and gave it a pull. With a flash a row of polished steel fangs shot out from below he upper lip, and the great striped napped at us like a wild animal. came the huge lid into its place, and the glasses on the swinging rack sang and inkled with the shock. The mate sat down

tinkled with the shock. The mate sat down on the edge of the table and shivered like a frightened horse. "You've saved my life, Captain Barelay," said he. So this was the secret of the striped treasure chest of old Don Ramirez di Leyra, and this was how he preserved his ill-gotte gains from the Terra Firma and the prov ince of Veraquas. Be the thief ever so cumping, he could not tell that golden candlestick from the other articles of value. and the instant that he laid hand upon the terrible spring was unloosed and the murderous steel spikes were driven into his brain, while the shock of the blow sent the victim backward and enabled the chest to automatically close itself. How many, wondered, had fallen victims to the genuity of the mechanic of Augsburg. And is I thought of the possible history of that grim striped chest my resolution was very quickly taken.
"Carpenter, bring three men and carr

"Going to throw it overboard, sir? "Yes, Mr. Allardyce, I'm not superstition are more than a sailor can be called upon is as a rule, but there are some things which "No wonder that brig made heavy

weather, Captain Barclay, with such a thing on board. The glass is dropping fast, eir and we are only just in time."

So we did not even wait for the thre sailors, but we carried it out, the nate the carpenter and I, and we pushed it with our own hands over the bulwarks. There was a white spout of water and it was gone. There it lies, the striped chest, a thousand fathoms deep, and if, as some say, he sea will some day be dry land, I griev for the man who finds that old box and trie o penetrate into its secret.



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THIS latest story by the author of "A Gentleman of France," "Under the Red Robe," etc., fully equals those brilliant successes in vigor and masterly delineation of character, while it even surpasses them in subtlety and sustained interest.

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